



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL

March 6, 2020

GABRIEL ALBORNOZ
COUNCILMEMBER AT-LARGE

Testimony of Montgomery County Councilmember Gabe Albornoz SB 796 Developmental Disabilities Administration - Program Changes and Required Reports

Good afternoon. I want to thank you for consideration of this critical legislation and share the reasons why the Montgomery County Council supports SB796 and its companion bill HB984.

Prior to being elected to the Montgomery County Council in 2019, I was the Director of the Montgomery County Department of Recreation. The Department of Recreation is working hard to expand the opportunities people of all abilities have to participate and enjoy our programs and facilities. In that capacity, I was asked to serve on the County's Workgroup on Meeting the Needs of Residents with Developmental Differences. The Workgroup was charged with making recommendations on a wide range of issues, but it was the concern about the adverse impacts from the implementation of the DDA Transformation Plan that took center stage.

In the November 2018 workgroup report, the system-wide Call to Action recommendations were: 1) The Montgomery County Executive and Council must partner with the General assembly Delegation to receive regular progress reports focused on real impacts to individuals, families and providers and 2) The County Council and Executive must carefully monitor the ongoing rate setting study that allows services to be funded in a manner that allows providers to continue to provide services.

In the following months, having been elected to the County Council and named Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee, I have been deeply concerned about the Transformation Plan and the 25,000 people who rely on DDA services. There is significant confusion and angst. I have received many constituent letters including this

parent who wrote, “the issues are complex and as a parent I’m struggling to understand the ramifications and what I can do to prevent something with vast unintended consequences from taking place.”

Because the LTSS system has not been properly tested and the new rates are not finalized, our provider organizations, who operate without a financial cushion, have no certainty that they will be reimbursed for services they currently provide, the timing of reimbursements, whether they can actually afford to take on new people who are transitioning into the adult system, and frankly, whether they will be able to afford to serve the people they are currently serving.

I wish we didn’t have to ask the General Assembly to enact legislation to delay something – but given the history of the implementation it is important that you do. It is important that there is time to do this right and the bill’s requirements for reporting will provide critical oversight and transparency on what has progressed and what may still need improvement. And, while it may seem obvious, it is important that legislation requires that providers and individuals should not be adversely impacted by the move to LTSS or EVV and that people who lose eligibility must be notified by letter, have time to appeal that decision, and continue to receive services during the appeal process.

I brought these issues and SB796 to the County Council on February 24th. Every Councilmember understands this Transformation Plan has huge implications for this vulnerable population, for their families and caregivers, and for every organization that is dedicated to serving them – and I emphasize that the Council knows these organizations are dedicated to this cause and to their clients’ lives and well-being. We hope that you will adopt this legislation to give everyone the time that is needed to get these systems right and to ensure a smooth transition.